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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001496

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DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, S/CT; NSC FOR

E. MILLARD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08-27-13

TAGS: PGOV PTER PINS ASEC CE LTTE

SUBJECT: President Kumaratunga and supporters express concerns that the Tigers are targeting her for attack

Refs: (A) FBIS Reston Va DTG 260902 Aug 03  
- (B) Colombo 1492, and previous  
- (C) USDAO Colombo CE IIR 6 816 0078 03 (Notal)

(U) Classified by James F. Entwistle, Charge'  
d'Affaires. Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: President Kumaratunga and her supporters have recently expressed concerns that the Tamil Tigers are targeting her for attack. The police have found little merit in the claims, which seem to involve more than a dollop of politics. That said, the situation has to be monitored; the president has been attacked before and there is always a solid basis for anxiety about Tiger intentions. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) KUMARATUNGA'S CONCERNS: President Kumaratunga and her supporters have recently expressed concerns that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) are targeting her for possible attack. The claims by the president and her associates have been somewhat convoluted, and have included the following strands:

-- In a recent letter filled with references to earlier exchanges on security issues, the president criticized the government and specifically the police for failing to properly monitor her security. In the letter, which was leaked to the press, the president told T.E. Anandarajah, Sri Lanka's Inspector General of Police (IGP), that she feared that LTTE cadre were watching her movements and might try to assassinate her. The president specifically mentioned that the government had recently allowed Pulithevan, a high-level LTTE official, to stay at Colombo's Hilton Hotel. She noted that this hotel was located in a high-rise near the presidential compound, thus providing the LTTE official with a possible view of her movements. The president requested the IGP to look into the situation and report back to her. She said she was deeply dissatisfied with an earlier police report into her concerns (see below).

-- Janadasa Peiris, one of the president's spokesmen, was quoted as stating that the LTTE had possession "of the latest small weapons of the world" (NFI) and was planning to use them against the president.

-- Harim Peiris, another one of her spokesmen, was also quoted as stating that the president was clearly on the LTTE's "hit list." He went to blame the government for failing to adequately protect her from the LTTE.

13. (C) POLICE FIND LITTLE MERIT IN CLAIMS: Based on what we are hearing, there appears to be little merit in the claims being made by the president and her associates. V. Kanthasamy, a senior superintendent of police, told us August 27 that the police had conducted dozens of interviews and fully investigated the claim, and passed the results back to the president. The police had found no evidence that the LTTE was plotting against her and had told her that in their report. Kanthasamy said LTTE officials have indeed stayed at the Hilton Hotel during the course of the peace process, but there was no evidence that these officials, including Pulithevan, wanted to attack the president. Kanthasamy was not sure how the IGP would respond to the president's latest missive, but he said the matter remained under review.

14. (C) OBSERVERS SEE POLITICS: Mission has also spoken to a number of observers who believe that the president's claims appear to be politically inspired as much as anything else. Kethesh Loganathan, an analyst at the Center for Policy Alternatives, a well-regarded local think-tank, told poloff August 27 that, in making the claims regarding the LTTE, he thought the president was "grasping for attention." As long as the peace process went forward, Kethesh said he did not think there was any imminent threat on her life. He noted that the allegations regarding the Hilton were strange ones in that LTTE officials have been staying at

Colombo's luxury hotels almost routinely since the advent of the peace process, often booked into them by the Norwegian facilitators, and there had never been any indication that they were plotting an attack. Taranjit Sandhu, the polchief at the Indian High Commission, told polchief August 27 that he thought the president and her supporters were trying to "gain sympathy" through her claims and paint the GSL as being weak on the LTTE. He noted that he had not heard of any recent threats by the LTTE against the president, though the group continues to criticize her and her party's more lukewarm positioning on the peace process.

15. (C/NF) COMMENT: In spite of the concerns, the president does not seem to be a near-term target of the Tigers at this time, and -- despite cohabitation stresses -- we believe the GSL is fully committed to protecting the president. The situation has to be closely monitored, however. The president has been attacked by the LTTE before, losing an eye in a December 1999 attack in Colombo, and there is always a solid basis for anxiety about Tiger intentions. Moreover, as previously reported (see Ref C), LTTE cadre are freely allowed access to the south now due to the February 2002 ceasefire accord, and they are believed to be involved in widespread surveillance of government buildings and leaders. (Note: See Ref B regarding LTTE surveillance and Amcit issues.) END COMMENT.

16. Minimized considered.

ENTWISTLE